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ABSTRACT

If schools are to reorganize to meet the educational needs of disadvantaged children, should they become freer or more directed? This paper analyzes twelve schools, all of which in varying degrees have proved successful, and chosen because they indicate the broad range of free and directed school programs now being developed for disadvantaged children of all ages. The schools, analyzed in terms of a scale from the most directed classroom situation to the freest, include: the Amidon Elementary School; the Bereiter-Engelmann Preschool; the Institute for Developmental Studies; the Perry Preschool Project; the African Free School Program; the Montessori Program for the Disadvantaged; the English in Every Classroom Program of the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School; the Free Schools of Prince Edward County; Harlem Prep; the CAM Academy; the Pennsylvania Advancement School; and, the First Street School. What can be usefully said about free and directed schools and the needs of the disadvantaged is not so much a matter of comparing systems of education but of pointing out what freedom and directedness mean in successful educational practice. (Author/JM)

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# Free Versus Directed Schools: Benefits for the Disadvantaged?

**Nicolaus Mills, Ph.D.**

**Between 1965 and 1968 over three billion dollars were spent in U.S. schools to offset the disadvantages of about six million children. . . . It is the most expensive compensatory program ever attempted anywhere in education, yet no significant improvement can be detected in the learning of these "disadvantaged" children.**

**Ivan Illich**[1]

There is, to be sure, a certain faddishness in the fact that the question of free versus directed schools should now have the importance it does. As Joseph Featherstone recently observed, "The responses [to this controversy] tend to fall into the stereotyped categories of a cultural cold war . . . Hip people like the idea of open classrooms, because they seem to give children freedom; straight people fear the supposed absence of order, discipline, and adult authority."[2] The question of free versus directed schools is not a faddish one as far as the educational needs of disadvantaged children go, however. For it arises at a time when the failures of massive governmental efforts to solve the current school crisis are more apparent than ever, and there is a need, both political and psychological, to develop on a controlled scale school programs that can show positive results.[3]

What follows in this paper is an attempt to analyze twelve such programs, all of which in varying degrees have proved successful. The middle and largest section of this paper is concerned with describing the programs themselves: how they are run, what results they have had. The final section is concerned with what generalizations can be made about such programs: Do free schools provide a better emotional environment for disadvantaged children and directed schools offer more help in developing cognitive skills? Is one school generally superior to the other in educating disadvantaged children, or is some combination of the two most desirable? Are free schools as free and directed schools as directed as they claim to be, or are both usually hybrids?

**The informal English schools demonstrate in practice what Dewey argued in theory: that a deep and genuine concern for individual growth and fulfillment not only is compatible with but indeed demands an equally genuine concern for cognitive growth and intellectual discipline, for transmitting the cultural heritage of the society.**

**Charles Silberman**[4]

**Unfortunately, the history of education is paved with good intentions that have led to failure. Those who know the limitations of people as well as of educational methods are well aware that no miracle can assure easy success.**

**Fred M. Hechinger**[5]

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The twelve schools surveyed in this section have been chosen because they provide an indication of the broad range of free and directed school programs now being developed for disadvantaged children of all ages. The schools are analyzed in terms of a scale that starts with the most directed classroom situation and moves toward the freest. The scale is approximate rather than absolute, however, the differences between schools at both ends being obvious, the differences between schools in the middle often being debatable. Whenever possible test scores are used to measure the academic successes the schools have had, but this hard data has not been relied on to the exclusion of more intangible factors—such as what students themselves think about a school. Indeed, the most suspect experimental programs are those which produce an immediate rise in test scores but no changes in the disadvantaged student's feelings about himself or his relationship to society.

## I) THE AMIDON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Amidon Program, developed by Dr. Carl F. Hansen during the time he was Superintendent of Schools for the District of Columbia, represents an effort to return to what Hansen calls the "sanity of order and logic in curriculum organization and to the wisdom of teaching subject matter to children in direct and effective manner."[6] The program is characterized by an approach to education that is not only highly disciplined but highly traditional.

The Amidon School began as part of a redevelopment program in Southwest Washington, but when the school was finished before the housing around it, a decision was made to let Amidon serve the city at large and be a model in elementary school education. Thus, when Amidon opened in the fall of 1960, its 469 pupils came from 110 different schools. Seventy percent of them were nonwhite, and of these, all but a few were black. The only truly distinguishing feature of the Amidon school was that most of the students came to it because their parents had applied for them to do so. Otherwise, the Amidon students were representative of those who attend the Washington public schools.[7]

The curriculum of the Amidon School was developed to center on basic subjects with "life adjustment" as a secondary concern. As Superintendent Hansen noted:

**The Amidon concept is definiteness in curriculum, so that what is to be learned is, at least in a basic way, spelled out for the pupil. No fuzzy and unrestricted roaming for undefined facts and elusive ideas is to be found when the Amidon system is fully developed . . . the student knows what is expected of him, and that he is to be taught with a direction and certainty which will help him to be successful in doing what is expected of him.**[8]

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The preciseness of the stated Amidon curriculum was, moreover, matched by an equal preciseness in the running of the school. The two subjects most emphasized at Amidon were "language and numbers"; music and art were treated as secondary concerns. Students were grouped by ability, and then placed in classes in which the primary emphasis was on teaching the whole class at once. Even recess was run in such a way that unsupervised play was replaced by "directed instruction in physical education."[9]

Individual instruction at Amidon was thus minimized. Each subject was given a predetermined time allotment, and teachers were expected to stick to their lesson plans. The "basic cycle" at Amidon was one in which, "The teacher is to teach what is to be learned. The pupil is to study, practice, and know what is to be learned. The pupil is to be tested on what he has learned. The teacher is to reteach as needed." Added to this regime were textbooks designed to further relieve the teacher from "the unsuitable responsibility of judging for herself what should or should not be taught."[10]

The strictness of the Amidon program did not, however, generally seem repressive to students, parents, or teachers. While teachers felt that reading books within a class should be done at a variety of levels, on no other basic matter did they dispute the conditions under which they worked. From both students and parents there were some objections to the discipline at Amidon, but mostly there was overwhelming approval of the order it created and a willingness to take related matters, such as homework, very seriously. The results of achievement tests given the Amidon students substantiate the progress they did make. In a school system in which students are usually well below national norms, 82 percent of the Amidon scores equalled or excelled national scores, and in the verbal areas Amidon emphasized, reading, spelling, word discrimination, the results were best of all. Equally revealing is the fact that, based on intelligence scores (I.Q. at Amidon ranged from 44 to 132), 74 percent of the Amidon students tested exceeded expectancy levels and 6 percent equalled them, making a total of 80 percent at or above predictable levels.[11]

## 2) THE BEREITER-ENGELMANN PRESCHOOL

Recently Carl Bereiter has gone on record in favor of "maintaining schools for skill-learning purposes, at greatly reduced levels of support, and putting the money saved into other kinds of free cultural resources, with children set free most of the day to take advantage of them."[12] The Bereiter-Engelmann Academically-Oriented Preschool studied here reflects, however, only a very directed approach to the problem of educating disadvantaged children.

The school is based on the belief that disadvantaged children "must progress at a faster than normal rate if they are to catch up" with other children. What this means in practice for Bereiter and Engelmann is:

> **If disadvantaged children are to learn at faster than normal rate, they are going to have to learn from experiences of some other kind than those which have been responsible for the learning of more privileged children—experiences that are more potent generators of significant learning, experiences that can be compressed into a small period of time without losing their effectiveness.**[13]

The kinds of experiences Bereiter and Engelmann have in mind are those which focus upon certain formal academic objectives and relegate all nonacademic matters to a secondary position. They are very candid in admitting that this step means abandoning the traditional preschool concern with the whole child.

The Bereiter-Engelmann School, begun in 1965 in Urbana, Illinois, reflects a working out of this philosophy. Fifteen children were chosen to be taught according to the Bereiter-Engelmann method. They were selected from a predominantly black school district in which income was generally low. The fifteen children (average age four years, six months) came from families in which older brothers and sisters were having school problems and home was considered "unfavorable educationally."[14] From the beginning the children were given an intensive, highly directed program of instruction in basic language skills, reading, and arithmetic. Each of these subjects was taught as a separate class with its own teacher. The classes were 15 minutes in length, later expanding to 20 minutes as the children became adjusted to the routine. Singing was the only other major activity (with specially written songs to give additional practice in skills being taught in the classes). The total time spent in school was two hours, five days a week.[15]

Although there were only five students in each class, grouping was still done by ability. Children were able to get individual attention, but the class was teacher-oriented and run at a pace set by the teacher. The classrooms were arranged so as not to be distracting, and there were a limited number of toys available. As Bereiter and Engelmann note:

> **Classes were generally run in a business-like, task-oriented manner. Each period the children shifted to a different teacher for a different subject. The school thus resembled more nearly a high school than an elementary school, and was certainly in striking contrast to the "mother and her brood" atmosphere of many nursery schools.**[16]

In addition, all other phases of the school—from snack time to toilet periods—were run to reinforce the academic programs. Discipline was strict, and there was a system of rewards for good behavior in the classroom.

The performance of the children on a number of tests indicates the academic progress they made. On the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities they began more than a year and a half behind their age group, and at the end of seven months of schooling, they were approximately normal on the verbal subtests of ITPA and six months above average on Vocal Encoding. At the end of nine months the children were given the Wide Range Achievement Test. In reading 11 of the children scored at or above the beginning first grade level; in arithmetic 11 scored at or above the beginning second grade level. On I.Q. tests the children went from an average score of 93 before the program began to an average score of slightly over 100 by the end of the program. In short, there was no academic area in which clear and important gains were not made. As for social development, while it was not a prime concern of the school, the children, nonetheless, showed striking gains in their ability to get along with each other at play and at work.[17]

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## 3) THE INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES

Under the direction of Martin Deutsch, New York University's School of Education has run a teaching program for children (K-3) since 1962-63. The program is based on the belief that the "lower-class child does not have the same coping mechanisms [as the middle-class child] for internalizing success or psychologically surviving failure in the formal learning setting. . . . Further, because of the differences in preparation, he is more likely to experience failure.[18]

To correct what Deutsch calls the "stimulus deprivation" and "environmental disadvantage" of the lower-class child, the Institute has put into practice a program of "intervention." The program rejects as appropriate to the disadvantaged child a school environment in which warmth and affection are the primary ingredients and development is thought of as an "unfolding process." Instead, the program concentrates on stimulating cognitive processes that have not been developed by the earlier experiences of the disadvantaged child.[19] The developmental model that underlies most of the Institute's procedures and materials is a Piaget-based three-step learning sequence that consists of a sensorimotor stage in which perceptual discrimination through the use of concrete materials is stressed, a perceptual stage, which focuses on finer discriminations through contrasting stimuli of colors, shapes, and sounds, an ideational-representation stage, where the child learns to relate things on a verbal and conceptual level with a minimum of concrete aid.[20]

In practice the Institute's program is very specific and touches on all phases of the school day—from room arrangements to reading material. As Fred Powledge has noted, "Everything that occurs in an intervention classroom, ideally, is intellectual fodder, an ingredient in the antidote of stimulus deprivation."[21] From the use of pictures and mirrors (to give the child a sense of himself) to the manner in which, according to one instructor, the children "cognitively eat," the Institute emphasizes what will stimulate the language growth, concept formation, and perceptual discrimination it ultimately wants to develop.

The manner in which this intervention is carried on is not, however, intended to alienate the disadvantaged child from his home or neighborhood. To the contrary, there is a deliberate attempt at the Institute to draw parents and community people into the school programs, to have them as teachers or teachers' aides, and to make sure that educational materials, such as story books, do not have the usual white, middle-class bias.[22] The results of this carefully worked out program, as reflected in a variety of tests, show very positive gains made at the Institute, particularly during the first year of school. On the Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities, for example, virtually all of the children who undergo intervention do markedly better than a control group getting regular schooling. The test scores of the Institute's pupils are not, however, all the Institute could wish for. At certain later stages in their development, some of the advantages the Institute children have over the control group are due less to gains they have made than losses in progress on the part of the control group.[23]

## 4) THE PERRY PRESCHOOL PROJECT

The Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, was an experimental program designed to compensate for functional retardation in children from disadvantaged families. It began in 1962 and was terminated in 1967. During the five years of the project, 123 children were studied. Fifty-eight of these children were in the experimental program (which for each of them lasted two years), and 65 were in the control group. The children selected were black and from families (for the most part very poor) which had low scores on a Cultural Deprivation Scale. The mean Stanford-Binet I.Q. score for the children was 79.[24]

The preschool curriculum was derived mainly from Piagetian theory and focused on cognitive objectives. Emphasis was placed on the teacher gearing classroom activity to the individual child, but this effort was not allowed to subvert the program's concern with verbal stimulation rather than social behavior. Indeed, one of the strongest characteristics of the project was that teachers maintained a constant verbal communication pattern with each child, even when he did not respond. In addition to the regular morning of school, there was also a 90-minute home session that the project's teachers had with the children and their parents each week. These sessions were designed both to give teachers a better understanding of a particular child's educational needs and to involve parents in the program.[25]

While there were some differences in the teaching techniques used, these differences were minor rather than major. Teachers were required to prepare a lesson plan based on the Piagetian curriculum at least a week in advance, and the Perry School staff constantly met as a group Team teaching was the rule, and teachers taught the entire time they were in the classroom, avoiding serial teaching. In addition team teaching was supervised by an older teacher as well as a member of the Perry School research staff.[26] Cognitive skills served to divide the children, with the more advanced group taking units for language use, auditory discrimination, and complex dramatic play and the less advanced group spending time in basic skill training and simple pre-math concepts. There was also a period in the day in which children were free to select from one of four activity centers: the housekeeping area, the clock area, the art area, and the pre-academic (quiet) area.[27]

Children who participated in the program experienced immediate and significant improvement in cognitive functioning as measured on the following tests: Stanford Binet, Leiter International Performance Scale, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities. This improvement in functioning continued through the first three years of regular schooling, but after that point, the control group did just as well. Children in the preschool experimental group also performed significantly better on the California Achievement Test than children in the control group during the first three years of schooling, but here too it is important to make a qualification. This gain was derived primarily from the performance of the experimental girls. Children who went through the experimental program also seemed to adjust to school more easily than the control group. This gain appears, however, to be directly related to their academic performance, which makes school less of a trial for them than the control group.[28]

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## 5) THE AFRICAN FREE SCHOOL PROGRAM

The African Free School program, conducted in classrooms at the Robert Treat School in Newark, consists of an African Free School experimental class and a control group established for the purposes of comparative evaluation. The program began in 1970 and is now being refunded.

The students in the program at the time of its first evaluation were 56 in number and all of African-American racial origin. At the start of the program the achievement levels of the students were from two to four years behind national norms. The children in the program averaged 12.5 years in age, and the program included students from the fifth to eighth grades. Most of the AFS experimental group was born in Newark, and the control group was evenly divided between those born in Newark and those born elsewhere.[29]

The staffing of the program was geared to provide an equal number of personnel for the AFS experimental program and the control group. Each class was assigned a certified teacher and four teacher's aides. In the control group the teacher-aides assisted the teacher in carrying on regular classroom activities, while in the AFS class the teacher-aides took a more active part in the instruction by assuming responsibility for various phases of the curriculum. Both groups were ungraded. The control group was taught in accord with the regular Newark curriculum, the AFS class in accord with a curriculum designed to satisfy the standard curriculum and to allow for the introduction of Afro-American instruction.[30]

The AFS experimental program was based on a total learning environment in which a close relationship between teachers, students, and parents was emphasized. The teacher-aides allowed for individual attention to be given whenever special problems arose. In the AFS class students were required to respond to questions with a prescribed ritual that stressed group responses and repetitive answers. The specific curriculum of the AFS program consisted of the following courses and activities: "Swahili, History (with emphasis on African and African-American), Literature (emphasis on African and African-American and Asian), customs and concepts (which teaches unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics . . . travelogue (going by film and book to places all over the world with an emphasis on places where black people are), Simba Wachanga (boys: drill, physical training and health studies; girls: African-American and African dance troupe, health studies and hygiene), Seventh wonder (guest speakers who come from all walks of life) . . . remedial programs in mathematics, arts, and crafts."[31]

In terms of the AFS goals of teaching "racial dignity and pride without teaching racism" and of "improving emotional achievement of students," the experimental program has been a marked success. The AFS class shows a much higher level of self-confidence and self-image than the control group, and has been well motivated to keep up with the program (they have a low absence rate). On the other hand, the academic achievement of the AFS experimental class has not been equal to that of the control group. In word skills the AFS group lost ground when measured in terms of the Metropolitan Achievement Test, and in problem solving their gains were significantly less than those of the control group. In reading and computational skills, they were also behind the control group, but not in a serious way. What these results indicate is that so far the learning gains of the AFS experimental group do not seem likely to remedy defects in their formal education.[32]

## 6) THE MONTESSORI PROGRAM FOR THE DISADVANTAGED

The Montessori programs that have been instituted in disadvantaged areas are not directed in the traditional sense of being teacher-oriented or outwardly restrictive of children's freedom. Yet, they follow a very thoroughly planned format, and the result is a subtle but continuous direction of all classroom activity. George Stevens has described this arrangement in an essay on the "Implications of Montessori for the War on Poverty":

> **The Montessori educational format, then, preserves the freedom of the individual child while introducing him into a highly structured learning environment. The children can choose to work alone or together or not at all. However, by virtue of the structured learning apparatus, the freedom is only relative. Everything in the prepared environment is designed to interest the child in learning; therefore, he is in fact being channeled into certain lines of intellectual and personal development. The child's freedom is really a matter of choosing which aspect of his culture he wishes to master first and in what manner he wishes to master it.**[33]

What this Montessori direction, with its emphasis on sensorial development and autoinstructional materials, means in practice has been spelled out by Lena Gitter in her pamphlet, "A Strategy for Fighting the War on Poverty." The program that Gitter describes is one that has its basis in a "prepared environment" in which everything from furniture to educational materials has been designed to suit the child. At the heart of the program lies what the Montessori Schools call Sensorial Exercises and Practical Life Exercises. The first of these exercises stresses the fact that until a child actually experiences an object, there is no point in having him give it a name. He must first have a correct sensory understanding of an object, and then be able to label it with the correct word. In the prepared Montessori environment equipment is available for the child to isolate and use specific senses, and later on, when the child is able to do more advanced work, there are such things as sandpaper letters for his use.

The Practical Life Exercises involve a variety of day-to-day skills (washing, shoe polishing, setting the table) which are designed not only to make the child feel more comfortable in his environment but to build up his confidence about himself. Their relationship to the Montessori program is vital, for they reinforce the patterns of learning and order established in the other exercises and stress the fact that in the Montessori program there is no division between the mastery of cognitive skills and the development of sensorial awareness.[34]

The degree to which a Montessori program can help disadvantaged children learn has been documented by Dr. Henry S. Johnson in his study, "The Effects of Montessori Techniques on Culturally Disadvantaged Children." Dr. Johnson's report is on the Clovis Montessori School in Fullerton, California. The program itself was six weeks in duration, and 80 percent of the children in it were of Mexican-American heritage. At the conclusion of the program the children showed I.Q. gains of 7 to 19 points and gains in perceptual-motor skills of six months. Indeed, they made progress in virtually every area tested (a more modest success was a three-month gain on a Wide Range Arithmetic Test).[35]

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## 7) THE ENGLISH IN EVERY CLASSROOM PROGRAM OF THE W. J. MAXEY BOYS TRAINING SCHOOL

This program at the W. J. Maxey School at Whitemore Lake, Michigan, is another case of a situation in which students are given great leeway and also are subjected to a format that is highly directed. The program is based on the assumption that teaching disadvantaged students to read and write English through formal instruction in a class that meets once a day and relies on "classical" texts is bound to fail.

The English in Every Classroom Program alters this procedure. To begin with, it uses newspapers and periodicals as its basic reading material. While traditional texts are not excluded, the program assumes that its primary goal is to encourage reading in any form and that this effort means dealing with the magazines and newspapers that are most widely available. Writing follows along similarly untraditional lines. Papers are required every other day in all subjects other than English. Some of these papers are passed on to be read by the student's English instructor, who corrects for grammar and rhetoric, other papers are read for content by non-English teachers, and still others are filed away unread. (This latter practice is done to emphasize doing writing as valuable in itself.) Students also keep a journal in which they are required to write at least two pages each week. These journals may be read by the English teacher, but only if the student wishes. The result is a program in which "diffusion" and "saturation" are the two working principles. The diffusion refers to the variety of the reading matter. The saturation refers to the fact that the reading and writing of English pervade all activities at the Maxey school.[36]

That such an approach to English is social rather than literary in its emphasis is freely admitted by Dan Fader, the creator of the English in Every Classroom Program. But the program as put into practice has not been undisciplined or unsystematic in its aims. The list of books at Maxey (2,200 titles and 7,500 volumes for 280 boys) has been carefully chosen and modified, and the responsibilities of the teaching staff for developing a basic literacy among the students (ages 12 to 18 with an average reading level at fourth grade prior to the program) are more rather than less than in a traditional public school.[37]

The results of tests given both a control group and selected students from the Maxey School show the benefits of the English in Every Classroom Program. The boys from the Maxey School show not only a much stronger sense of self-image but a greater improvement in learning skills. On a Verbal Proficiency Test the scores of the Maxey boys go up 20 percent, while those of the control group go down. On the Stanford Achievement Test both groups improve over the course of the year, but the boys at Maxey make more than twice the progress of the control group.[38]

## 8) THE FREE SCHOOLS OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

The Free Schools of Prince Edward County (Virginia) went into operation in 1963, four years after the county made a decision to close its public schools rather than integrate them. The schools were opened as a result of pressure from blacks in Prince Edward County and from the Kennedy administration. At a news conference in 1963 the President noted, "There are only four places in the world where children are denied the right to attend school: North Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea, and Prince Edward County."[39] William vanden Heuvel, then an assistant to the Attorney General, was instrumental in arranging backing for the project, and Neil Sullivan was persuaded to accept the position of Superintendent of the Free Schools. The staff of the Free Schools reflected a similarly broad background. Half were from Virginia and half were from out of state, recruited from public school systems as well as organizations like the Peace Corps.

The aim of the Free Schools was not only to give black children in Prince Edward County an education but, as much as possible, to make up for what they had missed over the previous four years. While the organization of the school did not involve radical innovation, it did involve a format free from the usual conventions and a learning environment in which discipline problems were virtually nonexistent. A nongraded program was initiated to provide continuous learning for students and to allow flexibility in advancement. Students were grouped according to ability and stage of academic advancement rather than by age, and they were allowed to move on to new levels as soon as they had mastered the content skills of the preceding one. At the same time, team teaching was instituted, thus making it possible to vary the size of classes and to allow teachers to work individually with students. The subject of greatest concern in the Free Schools was language arts work, and a major portion of the day was allotted to this area. Math, social studies, science, and fine arts were the other basic academic areas. In these areas a special emphasis was put on acquiring the concepts of the course rather than on developing particular skills.[40]

Of the 1,578 students in the Free Schools all but a few were black. Many had never been to school at all, and most had not received instruction during the four years the Prince Edward County schools were closed. The average income for a black family in Prince Edward County in 1963 was $1,800, and during the summer before the Free Schools opened I.Q. tests administered to 800 of the county's black children showed the mean I.Q. to be 69—"borderline defective."[41] The teaching program at the Free School provided excellent results, however. In ten months time, students advanced on an average of two years scholastically (in terms of their test scores), and in a number of cases progress was three and four years. Moreover, the greatest strides were made in the last rather than the first five months of school, an indication that had the school been able to continue longer, results might even have been better. Of the graduating class of twenty-three, twelve had plans to continue their education, and for them there was an abundance of scholarship help.[42]

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## 9) HARLEM PREP

Founded in 1967 through the sponsorship of the New York Urban League, Harlem Prep was created to provide an alternative education for Harlem youths who had rejected traditional school programs. The provisional charter which the New York State Department of Education granted Harlem Prep describes its purposes in the following terms:

> **To establish, conduct, operate, and maintain a non-sectarian, private college preparatory school for boys and girls between the ages of 16 and 21 who have dropped out of school and who, in the opinion of the administration of the school, can be motivated to complete secondary education, to provide such education for such boys and girls, and to develop liaison with a number of colleges eager and willing to accept such graduates.**[43]

From its original enrollment of 49 students, Harlem Prep has grown to an enrollment of 400 students, ranging from 17 to 40 years in age. Money is still a problem for the school, which is housed in a former supermarket on Eighth Avenue in Central Harlem, but as a result of grants from Standard Oil of New Jersey, the Ford Foundation, the Chase Manhattan Foundation, and other sources, Harlem Prep is now on a sounder basis than at any time in its history.[44]

The students at Harlem Prep are given both a great deal of freedom and responsibility and at the same time are subjected to a highly disciplined curriculum. Along with teachers, students plan and evaluate material to be studied in class. They organize and elect their own student council and write their constitution. They also have real economic and political power outside the classroom. They elect a representative to the Board of Trustees, raise funds for meeting the school's budget, administer money in the student welfare account, and are represented at faculty conferences. The classes at Harlem Prep are conducted in an open area, without walls or partitions. Students are free to visit classes other than their own, and if they wish, to take part in them. The curriculum at Harlem Prep involves the usual number of basic subjects (English, Math, Science), but it also reflects the special interests of its students through courses in Black Theatre, Swahili, and African Studies.[45]

The freedom and responsibility which the students at Harlem Prep exercise reflects, however, their closeness with one another and the faculty. As one student noted, "Harlem Prep really is a family—and not one just in name."[46] The emblem of the school, MOJA, LOGO, Unity, Brotherhood, is indicative of the atmosphere within it. Indeed, Harlem Prep emphasizes the fact that the education it provides is not intended as a means of escaping the community but a means of allowing students to develop so they may return to the community and render it service.

Thus, while students have a great deal of leeway and real power, graduation is contingent upon their demonstrating the capacity for doing college work and establishing a record "for consistent attendance and punctuality" in school. A student is expected to make up material in any class he misses, and there is no way around the material Harlem Prep feels is basic for a college education. The results speak for themselves. All of Harlem Prep's graduates go on to college, and to date very few of them have dropped out. This record is far and away the most impressive *and* practical indication by an alternative school for disadvantaged students of its capacity for developing a program that provides a high level of education. That three years after its founding, a graduating class of 116 Harlem Prep students should be accepted with scholarships to 139 different schools (in many cases more than one college was interested) is proof that colleges, too, find Harlem Prep an extraordinary place.[47]

## 10) THE CAM ACADEMY

The CAM (Christian Action Ministry) Academy in Chicago was founded in 1967 to teach students who dropped out or were pushed out of the public school system. It is located in a building in the area of Chicago which was burned during the riots that followed the shooting of Martin Luther King. The school's flyer bills it as a "second-chance, nongraded high school with qualified teachers" and an "Afro-American emphasis."[48] The Academy is particularly interested in those who wish to continue their education after they have left it.

CAM's courses are divided into three levels, and students are placed according to results on the California Test Bureau's Test of Adult Basic Education. At level one Basic Math, English I, II or Reading, a Writing Workshop, and Observation and Inquiry must be completed. At level two a student must take Introduction to Science, Introduction to Culture, Humanities, Art, Advanced Writing, Drama, and Current Events. Level three consists of individual research projects in Advanced Science, Humanities, and Culture, which are done under a teacher's supervision. Prior to level three students, however, also receive close personal attention and move at their own pace. Attendance is voluntary, and the classes are informal in nature.[49]

The teaching at CAM is in addition highly innovative in a number of areas. The Writing Workshop, for example, avoids the traditional grammar and punctuation emphasis of such classes and concentrates on "image making" and speed writing. A course in Educational Psychology, open to all students who have taken one other course at CAM, is designed to get students involved in curriculum research and development. The course focuses on the psychology of learning and classroom techniques, and the students involved in it spend one period a day teaching their own classes or working as research assistants.[50]

CAM's enrollment, 72 in its first year, 170 in its second, is modest by standard high school proportions, but its relative smallness is the key to its success. The special attention CAM gives to its students enables it to have excellent results. In its first year, for example, CAM graduated 35 students with its own certificate (which guarantees a tenth-grade reading level) and 22 of these students then went on to college. CAM's graduates have a higher reading average than the graduates of Chicago's public schools, and in addition to going on to college, most of them take and pass the Chicago public school examination, which is offered as the equivalence of a high school diploma. What makes these figures particularly noteworthy is that, although the men entering CAM average 10.2 years in the Chicago public schools and the women 8.8 years, their scores place them at the seventh grade level in reading, math, and language.[51]

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## 11) THE PENNSYLVANIA ADVANCEMENT SCHOOL

The Pennsylvania Advancement School takes in students from the fifth to eighth grades who have been performing below capacity in their regular schools. Most of the pupils in it are black and from low-income families. It originally began in Winston-Salem, North Carolina with a $500,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation, but interference from the North Carolina Board of Education (The Advancement School was the first integrated boarding school in the South) caused it to move to Philadelphia. It is now run as a nonprofit corporation with a board of directors and is under a contract with the School District of Philadelphia. It has 43 staff members, and serves from 150 to 220 students. Except for becoming a day school rather than a residential school, the Advancement School has generally followed its original format. The school is located on the third and fourth floors of what once was a factory.[52]

The Advancement School concentrates on the emotional growth of its students and makes extensive use of group therapy, role playing, and psychodrama. Subjects are treated as a "process" rather than a narrow body of learning. There is an emphasis on making a student's own experiences and interests part of the course. Thus, history and geography at the Advancement School have centered on Philadelphia itself and included such subjects as the rise of street gangs in the city. There has also been a reading-boxing course in which the students themselves boxed, went to boxing matches, and then read books on boxing.[53]

What all of this means in practice is that in the five or six courses students take per 14 week term they learn mainly through action. The courses involve a variety of experiences in which students must either interact with each other (as in improvisational drama) or else practice what they are learning: write plays and not just read them, make cameras and develop photos, conduct science experiments. The "planned environment" that the student initially encounters in the Advancement School is one that has been set up to stimulate him, but it is in turn an environment which he is free to change and respond to in individual ways. In no course at the Advancement School is the content organized into a set sequence at the beginning of a term, and students are continually encouraged to develop a curriculum that interests them. Indeed, students of the Advancement School are often used as teachers in it and at nearby elementary schools.[54]

The academic results of the Pennsylvania Advancement School are generally modest. The most extensive report to date is a follow-up study of 175 boys who spent a 14-week term at the school. When they returned to their original schools, 96 pupils or 55 percent of the group improved, 15 pupils showed no change, and 64 pupils went down hill. The Advancement School contends that these results show that nearly two-thirds of the time it was able to stop a downward academic spiral. On the other hand, what these figures mean in fact is an average gain of 1/5 a grade point for students functioning below par when they entered the Advancement School.[55] Reading tests administered to another group of boys from the Advancement School show similar results. In general the improvement in reading scores was modest and did no more than keep pace with what the boys were doing prior to the Advancement School. The one notable exception in this case was the reading-boxing class in which the boys showed an 8/10 of a year reading improvement on the Durrell-Sullivan Reading Test after three months work.[56]

## 12) THE FIRST STREET SCHOOL

The First Street School in New York reflects the most intensive commitment by any school in this study toward granting its students real freedom. In the words of First Street's Director, George Dennison:

> **Perhaps the single most important thing we offered the children at First Street was hours and hours of unsupervised play. By unsupervised I mean that we teachers took no part at all, but stood to one side and held sweaters. We were not referees, or courts of last resort.**[57]

In practice the First Street School abandoned virtually all the structure of a traditional school:

> **We abolished tests and grades and Lesson Plans. We abolished Superiors too—all that petty and disgusting order of the school bureaucracy. . . . We abolished homework (unless asked for); we abolished the category of truant.**[58]

The abandonment of such a structure by the First Street School was, however, positive in nature and based on the belief that "in doing this, we laid bare the deeper motivations and powers which contribute to what might be called 'internal order,' i.e., a structuring of activities based upon the child's innate desire to learn."[59]

The First Street School Faculty conceived of the school as a total environment for growth:

> **where the public school conceives of itself merely as a place of instruction, and puts severe restraints on the relationships between persons, we conceived of ourselves as an environment for growth, and accepted the relationships between the children and ourselves as being the very heart of the school.**[60]

The size of the school made it possible for faculty to find the time to be close to students. First Street began with nine students and ended up with 23. It had three full and one part-time teacher, and others who came in to assist for classes in singing, dancing, and music. The classes were according to age: 5 to 8, 8 to 10, 10 to 13, with students free to go to different classes if they felt like it. The school was located on the Lower East Side, and both faculty and the children lived nearby. The majority of the students were nonwhite and poor, and all had had problems in the public schools. The parents of the First Street School were not initially committed to the school's libertarian approach, but as the year went on and the students began liking school, the parents' feelings changed, and there arose a closeness between them and the First Street teachers.[61]

The results of the First Street School are difficult to assess in the absence of any hard test data from the school, but they were clearly positive in nature. The emotional problems of most of the children in the school diminished considerably, and progress in turn was made in a variety of formal skills, particularly reading. On the other hand, as George Dennison has acknowledged, "We can boast of very little in the way of long-range effects." The First Street School lasted only two years, and so came to provide very little continuity in the lives of the children it helped. While some of them managed to keep the gains they made, others slipped back to where they had been before the school started.[62]

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> **It may well be that certain levels of literacy and ability in arithmetic constitute "fundamentals" for survival in America. . . . But it does not follow that learning these things can be achieved by a single set of techniques. . . . More defensible is the assumption that, while drill, order, and tight discipline may be suitable for some students and teachers, they may be destructive for others; that "permissive" classes or Deweyan practice may work well with certain personalities but not with everyone.**
>
> **Peter Schrag[63]**

> **A final word on the faddishness of our educational concerns. The appearance of new ideas, such as the clamor for open, informal schools, does not cancel out old ideas. "Open education" will be a sham unless those supporting it address themselves to recurring, fundamental problems, such as the basic inequality and racism of our society.**
>
> **Joseph Featherstone[64]**

It would be very reassuring if this study of free and directed schools could conclude with a definitive statement on which type of school is better suited for disadvantaged children. But clearly there is, as yet, no evidence for a generalization of this sort. One has directed schools like the Bereiter-Engelmann Preschool with outstanding academic success and directed schools like the Newark African Free School, where formal gains are extremely limited despite striking changes in student morale. The same variety of results is true for the free schools. Some, like the Pennsylvania Advancement School, barely make academic inroads. Others, like Harlem Prep, leave little to be desired in all phases of education. The only conclusion supported by this survey is one that reinforces previous evidence on the question of free versus directed schools: in terms of conventional tests and cognitive skills, students educated in directed schools tend to do slightly better than those educated in free schools, but the difference is slight and in no way supports a claim for the overall superiority of one or the other kind of school.[65]

What can be usefully said about free and directed schools and the needs of the disadvantaged is then not so much a matter of comparing systems of education but of pointing out what freedom and directedness mean in successful educational practice. In this regard it is fair to say that directedness has shown itself to be a vital element in the teaching of cognitive skills to disadvantaged children. This is true not only of the programs which are unequivocal about the nature of their directedness but also of the programs which stress freedom. Indeed, it was difficult to find a successful program in which directedness was not part of the teaching process. Even at a libertarian school like First Street, the director had no qualms about asserting "adult" direction when he thought it required and telling one of his students it was time to begin reading lessons. The most significant distinction in this area was not between directedness and nondirectedness but between overt direction, like that at the Amidon Elementary School, and covert direction, like that in the Montessori Head Start programs. Similar observations may be made with regard to the question of freedom. Very clearly in a number of schools the freedom students were given was responsible for changes in their motivation and self-esteem. But freedom in these cases was not leeway for the students to do as they pleased. Rather it was freedom to choose from a number of options: to discover what courses interested them, to learn at an individual rather than at a group pace. It was not unusual for students in a free school to end up doing many of the same things they would have in a directed school.

In practical terms what these observations suggest, however, is not simply that in the great majority of cases the free versus directed school controversy involves hybrid rather than "purist" forms of education. They also suggest that, if disadvantaged children (or for that matter, middle-class children) are to profit from the programs going on in free and directed schools, it will be necessary for individual public school systems to adopt a flexible attitude toward such programs: to use them only as they serve particular needs and not be swayed by pedagogical fashion.

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